



Computer education for children

Computers are often shunned in the pre-school or nursery environment and although many primary schools are encouraged to equip themselves with information technology it is not until year one that the children start to gain any IT experience. Often a solitary computer with a dust cover sits in the corner of a nursery group, more of a statement of compliance than one of an educational need.

Ryde Teaching Services specializes in computer courses for children as young as 18 months. They also teach GCSE ICT to 5 year olds and A level Computing to 10 year olds. Yes, these children tend to be the exception but are byproducts of what Ryde strives to achieve; offering a level of education to children to match their ability regardless of their age.

Ryde have found that by introducing ICT to young children other skills are also transferred such as literacy and numeracy. At an age of 18 months to 3 years computers are an invaluable tool to help develop hand-eye co-ordination, reading skills, interaction and control skills aside from the knowledge gained from the content of the software.

From ages 7-11 Ryde have found that many children have the ability to learn at a higher level than that which is delivered in many schools. It is commonplace for Ryde to have GCSE ICT passes from 7 years upwards and we often find that that the results can be better than those taking the exam at the more usual age of 15 or 16. Is it surprising when the educational system forces our children to take upwards of 8 to 10 GCSEs all in one summer? Why not spread academic qualifications across a child's educational career? Allow a child to sit an exam when they are ready.

"Having recently taught on a post-graduate computer science course I was astounded at the lack of knowledge of the basic skills; Programming and Systems Life Cycle are two that spring immediately to mind" said Mike Ryde (Principal at Ryde). "I would like to see more consistent and transparent links not just between

schools and business but also between business and those that affect curriculum content. These include the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), the examination boards and the DfES." Schools respond to curriculum changes and so it is important that our educational curriculum contains content from the real world based upon real needs.

There are many opportunities for business to benefit from the improvements to the educational system. "By teaching the more technical skills in schools children often amaze us with their ingenuity and fresh outlook on traditional problems. Children are far more creative than adults and being given the opportunity to learn software development skills allows them to be more imaginative when learning a relatively dry subject." Although experience and analytical skills will often develop with maturity, by the time children leave primary school their ability to learn will start to diminish.

Our educational system should tap into this massive learning resource. Why is it that the majority of our most educated teachers work in Universities and Colleges and not primary or secondary schools? In primary schools we seem to hold our children back at the time they are raring to go and then we push them relentlessly in Yr 10 and 11 (GCSE exam years). By spreading examinations across a child's academic career there are opportunities to focus and enjoy a subject, reduce examination pressure, and make retaking an examination possible (without affecting the next stage in their studying). Overall this will raise the academic floor allowing children to work at a higher academic level in their chosen subjects.

Dr. Mike Ryde PhD, MSc
Principal Ryde Teaching Services